

Tips to stay healthy this summer

From Montréal's director of public health

MONTRÉAL, 22 June 2016 – Summer's finally here! Doctor Richard Massé, regional director of public health at CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal, would like to wish all Montrealers a great summer. He also wants to share eight tips to prevent health problems that occur mostly in summer.

Tip #1: Develop good habits

When it's very hot, some people's health can deteriorate, especially that of older adults, people with chronic diseases, mental health problems and drug or alcohol addiction. Here's what you can do to avoid the harmful effects of heat:

- Spend a few hours a day in an air-conditioned place, such as a shopping mall or movie theatre.
- Drink a lot of water, even before you feel thirsty.
- Reduce physical effort.
- Take good care of seniors and people with physical or mental health problems.
- Keep a close eye on young children and never leave them alone in a car.

Tip #2: Handle food safely

During the summer, food poisoning and infections are common. They are mostly caused by E. coli contamination, often called "hamburger disease." Simple preventive measures can reduce the risk of getting E. coli and other gastrointestinal diseases. Here are some recommendations to keep from getting sick:

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water, especially after using the toilet, before handling food and before meals.
- Cook meat, fish or poultry until it reaches a high enough internal temperature (check it with a cooking thermometer; for safe cooking, see the practical advice on the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec's website: mapaq.gouv.qc.ca).
- Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly.
- Keep foods that must remain cold in the refrigerator until it is time to cook them.
- Put items to defrost in the refrigerator rather than on the kitchen counter.
- Avoid cross-contamination by keeping raw meat, poultry, seafood and their juices away from items that are ready to serve, and use different cooking utensils with each of them during preparation (especially cutting boards and knives).
- Wash your hands well after cooking, and thoroughly clean all surfaces and items used to prepare those foods.

Tip #3: Avoid insect bites

West Nile virus (WNV) and Lyme disease both spread through the bites of infected insects: mosquitoes for WNV and ticks for Lyme disease. Mosquitoes are especially active at sunrise and sunset. Here are some recommendations to avoid bug bites:

- When outdoors, wear light-coloured long pants and long-sleeved top; apply insect repellent containing DEET on exposed skin, according to the manufacturer's instructions (it is not recommended to use insect repellent on children aged 6 and under; however the product can be applied on children's hats or caps).
- Check screens for holes and remove any water that collects in outdoor objects, such as buckets, barrels and old tires.

The same advice regarding protective clothing and use of DEET-based insect repellent applies to prevent tick bites (Lyme disease). Here are additional recommendations:

- When you go to wooded areas, wear a hat, closed shoes, and light-coloured long pants and long-sleeved top to help you spot ticks.
- Take a shower when you return from a walk in the woods or through tall grass, and check your body and your pets carefully.
- If you see a tick, remove it immediately with tweezers and call Info-Santé (811).

Tip #4: Be careful around wild or unfamiliar animals

Being bitten or scratched by an animal with rabies, or coming into contact with an animal's saliva is very risky. Here are some recommendations to stay safe:

- Don't go near a wild animal (especially a bat, raccoon, fox or skunk) or an unfamiliar domestic animal (cat or dog); don't feed or touch it, even if it is dead or looks friendly; don't try to save it or bring it home to take care of it. The animal may not have rabies, but its bite can cause serious injuries.
- Teach children these preventive behaviours.
- If you are bitten or scratched by an unfamiliar animal, wash the area with soap and water for 10 to 15 minutes and call Info-Santé (811).
- Get your pets vaccinated against rabies to protect them from the disease.

Tip #5: Pull up ragweed

Every year, from June to the first frost in the fall, ragweed grows and spreads throughout Montreal.. To help improve the respiratory health of people who are allergic to its pollen, ragweed must be pulled up, mowed or cut down in mid-July and again in mid-August. If you have allergies, here are some recommendations:

- Avoid places where ragweed grows.
- Keep doors and windows closed, especially at night; ragweed releases pollen early in the morning.
- Avoid doing outdoor activities when pollen levels in the air are high (especially between 7:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. on hot, dry, windy days) (check pollen counts). When it rains, pollen grains fall to the ground, which reduces allergic reactions.
- Avoid mowing the lawn or raking leaves yourself.
- From mid-July to the end of September, don't dry your clothes outdoors.
- If needed, use an air conditioning or air filtration system (keep filters clean).
- Avoid contact with other irritants such as tobacco smoke, which can amplify symptoms of allergy.
- See a doctor if symptoms persist, interfere with your usual activities, or worsen.

Tip #6: Protect your summer loves

Responsible sexual behaviours are the best way to protect yourself against sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBI), which can affect your health, well-being and reproductive system. Unprotected sexual activities can increase the risks of getting an STBBI. Here are some recommendations to protect yourself:

- Use condoms during sexual activities, regardless of the type of penetration.
- Reduce your number of sex partners.
- Get tested for STBBI regularly and when you have a new partner.

Tip #7: Walk or take public transportation instead of using your car

In summer, the air quality in Montréal can sometimes be poor. Here's what you can do to help reduce smog:

- Walk.
- Use your bicycle, or take the bus or metro to get around.

If you have a respiratory or heart disease, avoid doing intense physical activities outdoors during smog episodes.

Tip #8: Be on the alert for bed bugs

Moving season is back. It's important to take precautions to prevent bed bugs from spreading. Here are some recommendations linked to this issue:

- Don't pick up clothing, stuffed furniture, mattresses, or bedroom furniture left on the sidewalk.
- If you see any bed bugs in your apartment, tell the building owner or manager right away so he can make arrangements with an exterminator.
- Don't try to get rid of bed bugs yourself.
- If you throw out bed bug infested furniture, take precautions: make the items unusable and place them in large plastic bags; indicate on the bag, in French and English, that there are bed bugs on the items.

"I urge all Montrealers to follow these tips and share them with family and friends," said Dr. Massé. "Go to santemontreal.ca/eteensante/en to find out more and to see the list of clinics opened on a walk-in basis during evenings and weekends."

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SOURCE: CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal, Direction régionale de santé publique

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